DA DA DA DA

WE'RE HERE, MASTER ARLEQUINO.

AH! IT'S OVER THERE!

ACT VIII : KARAKURI * MACHINERY
"ONCE UPON A TIME / IV"

DADA

DA

THAT WAS QUICK.

WELL...

WWVOM

Clic

BUT... HOW DID YOU BECOME A "SHIRO-GANE"...

...LUCILLE?

HM?

NARUMI.

THERE IS TOO MUCH CONFLICTING INFORMATION ABOUT THAT DISEASE... ALLOW ME TO EXPLAIN.

NOW WE KNOW THAT THE AUTOMATONS HAVE DESTROYED YOUR VILLAGE AND SPREAD ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME.

...IT PREVENTS US FROM DYING!

"CONFLICTING INFORMATION"?! I'VE SUFFERED FROM ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME!

I KNOW VERY WELL THE PAIN IT CAN CAUSE WHEN YOU CAN'T MAKE PEOPLE LAUGH!

YES... BUT YOU'RE STILL WRONG. THE REAL DIFFICULTY WITH THAT DISEASE IS NOT THE PAIN IT CAN PROVOKE, BUT THE FACT THAT...

Three years passed ...

Then five years ...

The smell in the air of burnt bodies finally disappeared...

But...

The automatons left after the slaughter.

Even so, people affected by the syndrome weren't dying!

Bodies of some became completely inert.

The attack which kept people from breathing was perpetually happening, combined with the epilepsy attack.

GULP

CAN YOU EVEN UNDERSTAND THE INTENSITY OF SUCH PAIN?

But the death that should have relieved them from their pain never showed up!

YES, THEY DID... BY CHANCE, SOME OF THEM HAD SEEN THEIR BODIES FALLING INTO DISREPAIR... THE RAIN, THE FROST, AND ALL THE ELEMENTS THEY WERE EXPOSED TO WERE SLOWLY REDUCING THEIR BODIES TO NOTHING.

THEN, NOBODY DIED FROM IT?

...were unfortunately sheltered when our strength began to decline.

Marie, Tania, and a dozen villagers including me...

But... My daughter, Angelique ...

IN FALL, OUR SAVIOR ARRIVED.

SIX YEARS AFTER THE EVENTS ...

AND THEN,

The beverage he made us drink was soft and warm... it relieved us from our pain almost instantaneously.

SLURP

I opened my eyes to look at him.

A... AAH...

I'M SORRY. I DON'T HAVE MUCH LEFT.

BUT IT SHOULD BE ENOUGH.

...

DON'T BE SCARED BY MY GARB. I'M KIND OF A DOCTOR.

...DOC ...TOR?

FHH

FHH

FHH

FHH

YES.

TELL ME WHAT HAPPENED HERE...

The man in black ... The castle ... The automatons ... and the slaughter ...

I told him everything.

I was already getting better.

Then he came with me to the castle...

He listened to me without saying a single word.

There ...

IIK

There was a big oven.

And the room was filled with containers and weird instruments.

But he told me that there would be nobody there.

I didn't want to go with him at first because I was really scared.

CLOC

AN "ETERNAL BEING".

HERE, SOMEONE PERFORMED ALCHEMICAL EXPERIMENTS IN ORDER TO CREATE...

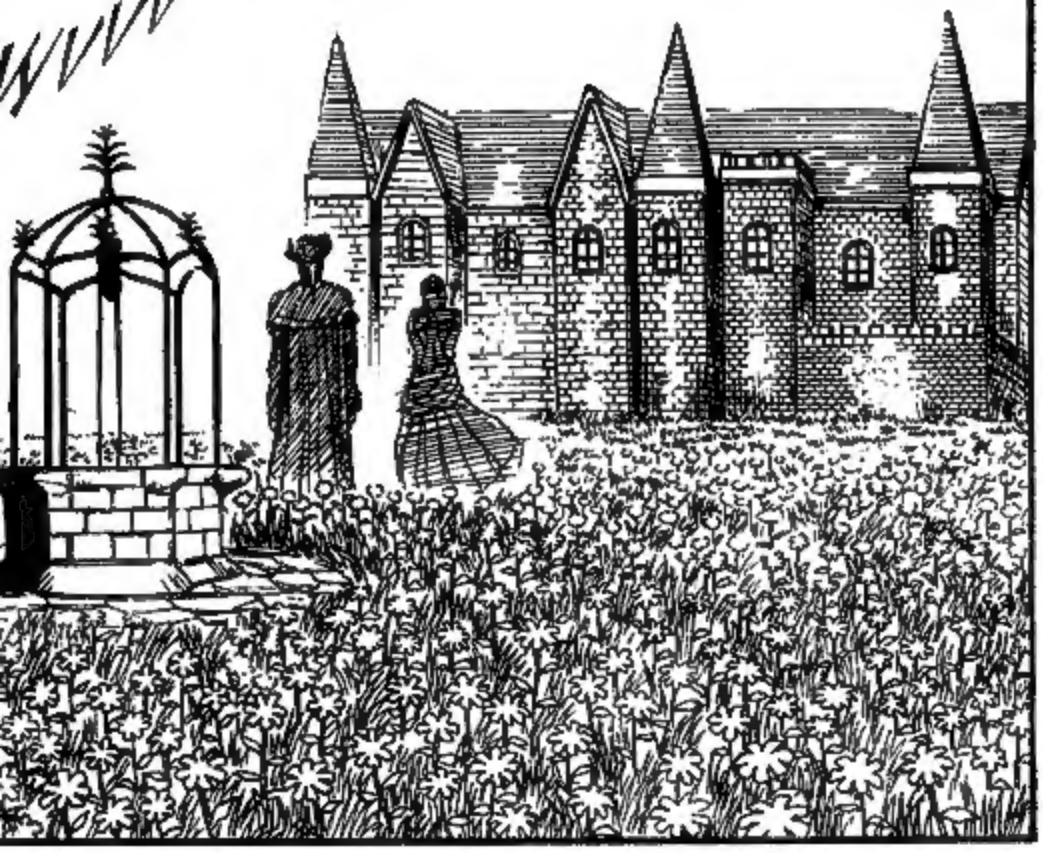
WHAT IS THIS PLACE?

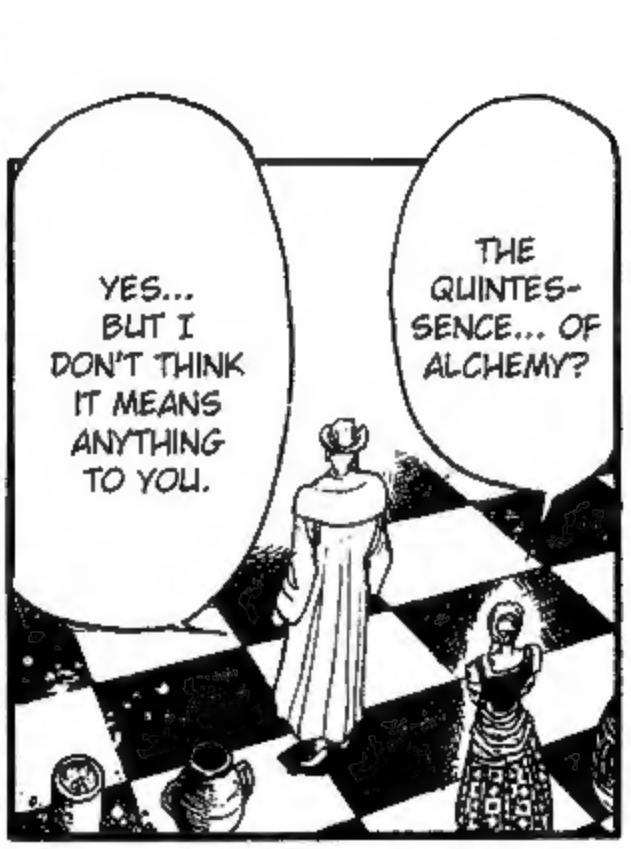
WHAT'S REALLY SURPRISING IS THAT HE USED SOMETHING WHICH IS THE QUIN-TESSENCE OF ALCHEMY.

FROM WHAT I'VE SEEN SO FAR, HE'S ALREADY SUCCEEDED IN CREATING AT LEAST ONE OF THOSE PERFECT CREATURES.

THAT MAN IN BLACK WAS LOOKING TO CREATE PERFECT BEINGS WHICH NEVER GET OLD. IN OTHER TERMS, INDEPENDENT AUTOMA-TONS.

WHAT?

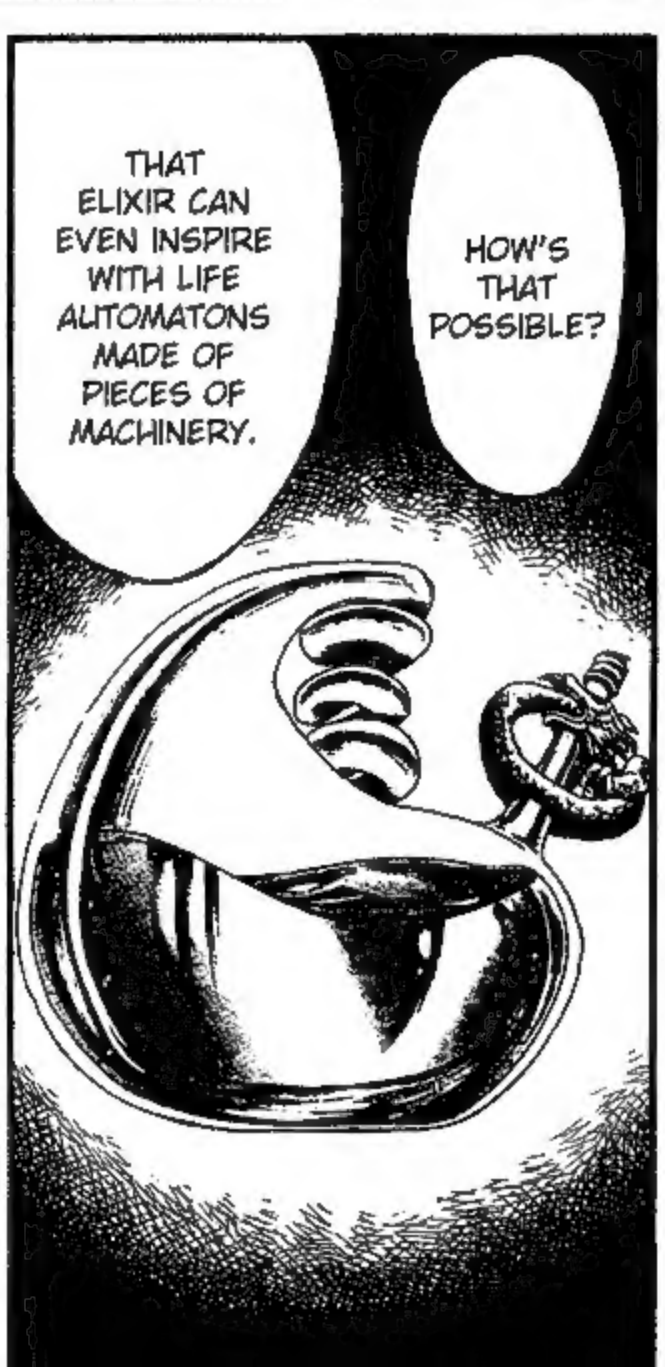



YES... BUT I DON'T THINK IT MEANS ANYTHING TO YOU.
THE QUINTES-SENCE... OF ALCHEMY?

IT MEANS THAT HE COULD MAKE AQUA VITAE IN IT.
YES.
VH...
YOU'VE TOLD ME THAT THE WELL WAS ENLIGHTED BY A RED GLEAM.

...EXIST?!
BUT... HOW CAN SUCH A THING...

IT'S MADE THANKS TO THIS...


THAT ELIXIR CAN EVEN INSPIRE WITH LIFE AUTOMATONS MADE OF PIECES OF MACHINERY.
HOW'S THAT POSSIBLE?

IT'S AN ELIXIR WHICH HEALS ANY WOUND OR ILLNESS. THAT'S WHAT I MADE YOU DRINK.
AQUA... VITAE? WHAT'S THAT?

IT'S CALLED A "SOFT STONE".

IT'S THE QUINTESSENCE OF THAT ART.

OWNING THAT MYSTERIOUS STONE IS THE PROOF THAT ONE HAS PERFECTLY MASTERED ALCHEMY.

IT'S TRUE. IT'S SOFT... AND A LITTLE BIT WARM.

TOUCH IT.

ALL THAT REPRESENTS THE ULTIMATE MASTERY THAT ALCHEMISTS TRY TO ACQUIRE.

THE SOFT STONE ALSO ALLOWS ONE TO TRANSFORM A SIMPLE PIECE OF COPPER INTO PURE GOLD BY STRAIGHT CONTACT.

IT GIVES LONGEVITY AND PERFECT HEALTH.

THE AQUA VITAE, WHICH CAN BE OBTAINED BY TRANSFORMING WATER THANKS TO THAT STONE, IS AN ALL-POWERFUL ELIXIR.

I HEARD ABOUT YOUR VILLAGE DURING ONE OF MY NUMEROUS TRAVELS.

WE'VE SET UP RULES AMONGST US.

I'M AN ITINERANT ALCHEMIST ...

THEN, YOU... YOU'RE ONE...

...MUST BE REPAIRED BY ANOTHER ALCHEMIST.

DAMAGES CAUSED BY AN ALCHEMIST...

FRAN-CINE.

WHY DON'T YOU LAUGH?

GGH...

IN ANY CASE, IN ORDER TO PALLIATE THE FLAWS OF THOSE CREATURES, HE INDULGED IN ATROCIOUS CRIMES...

I DON'T KNOW WHY.

...WAS ABLE TO CREATE AUTOMATONS IN THIS PLACE.

IN MY OPINION, THAT MAN IN BLACK ...

BUT THEY MUST'VE BEEN IMPERFECT.

VLU TCH

HOP HOP

THAT MY VILLAGE ...

WAS DESTROYED ...

JUST FOR THAT PURPOSE?!

YOU MEAN...

SCHRAC

REVENGE !!

HEU

RE... VENGE!

THE DISEASE WILL END UP DEFEATING YOU IF YOU STAY LIKE THIS.

NOW LET ME ASK YOU ONE QUESTION.

I'VE MADE YOU DRINK A SMALL QUANTITY OF AQUA VITAE.

DO YOU REALLY WISH TO TAKE REVENGE?

Or slowly die without being able to do anything...?

Do you wish to live and fight the man in black and the automatons...

I WANNA AVENGE THEM ALL!!

WHAT THEY DID TO OUR VILLAGE...

WHAT THEY DID TO MY SON...

I CAN'T...

...

FORGET

...

GOOD.

I'M GONNA HAVE TO ACT ON MY OWN RESPONSI-BILITIES, THEN.

BAH

SPLAOUF

BLOUP

PLIC PLOC

SPLATCH

VLAN!

CHHA

CHHH

WHAT'S ...

I'VE CREATED AQUA VITAE, THE ALL-POWERFUL ELIXIR...

BY THROWING THE SOFT STONE IN THE WELL!

YOU'LL BE ABLE TO SAVE ALL THE INHABITANTS OF YOUR VILLAGE WITH THAT QUANTITY OF AQUA VITAE.

IS THAT... TRUE?!

HOW CAN I THANK...

DON'T THANK ME!!

BUT ...

I...

THERE'S NO OTHER WAY. IT'S LIKE THIS.

BY ACCEPTING DRINKING THAT WATER...

...YOU'LL ALSO HAVE TO ACCEPT DEDICATING YOUR LIFE TO THE TOTAL DESTRUCTION OF AUTOMATONS!

TOMORROW, COME BACK AND DRAW WATER FROM THE WELL.

IT'LL BE YOUR TURN TO PUT THE SAME QUESTION TO THE OTHER VILLAGERS.

ONLY THOSE WHO'LL ACCEPT WITH FULL KNOWLEDGE OF THE FACTS...

...WILL BE ALLOWED TO DRINK THE AQUA VITAE.

GLNG

BUT...

WE'RE JUST PEACEFUL PEASANTS.

EVEN IF WE SURVIVE, HOW DO YOU WANT US TO FIGHT THOSE TERRIFYING CREATURES?

WHAT'S THIS?

TOMORROW, YOU'LL OPEN THE SAFE.

MAY I ASK YOU WHO YOU ARE?

MISTER... YOU SAVED US THANKS TO YOUR STRANGE ART BUT ALSO BECAUSE OF YOUR GREAT KINDNESS.

NOW, GO. YOUR DAUGHTER IS WAITING FOR YOU.

A LONG TIME AGO, I WAS BORN IN CHINA...

IN A FAMILY OF FAMOUS PUPPETEERS.

I GOT INTO ALCHEMY BECAUSE I ALSO WISHED...

...TO MAKE MY PUPPETS MORE "HUMAN".

...IT'S IMPOSSIBLE.

I KNOW THAT...

NOW...

ONE DAY, I WENT TO A COUNTRY NAMED JAPAN. PEOPLE THERE GAVE ME A NICKNAME I LIKE...

IT'S "SHIROGANE", WHICH MEANS "WHITE METAL" IN JAPANESE...

I drank the Aqua Vitae and opened the safe.

The next day, the man had disappeared... Forever.

Inside, there was... A sort of giant puppet.

ARLEQUINO!

WHO'S HERE?!

WHAT AN INTERESTING STORY!

LALANG